



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Thursday, March 29, 2012

7:00 PM

Groton Senior Center, Route 117

FYE 2013 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

I. ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Mayor Somers.

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri, Board of Education Chairman Kirsten Hoyt, RTM members, Board of Education members, Town Staff, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Office Assistant Lori Watrous.

II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Salute to the Flag was led by Mayor Somers.

III. INTRODUCTION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials introduced themselves at the request of Mayor Somers.

IV. READING OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

The Notice of Public Hearing pursuant to a resolution passed by the Town Council was read by Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher.

V. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

a. Town Manager

Town Manager Mark Oefinger gave a brief summary of the proposed FYE 2013 budget. He stated that the proposed budget is \$122,604,099 which represents a 3.5% increase over the current year. He explained that there are six parts which make up the budget, and summarized the proposed changes in each of those areas. Mr. Oefinger remarked that despite an overall increase, the FYE 2013 budget proposal does not address certain items. If the Town does not eliminate programs, it will need to develop a more robust economic development program, and there is no funding set aside in the event there is another round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).

b. Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent Paul Kadri summarized the proposed Board of Education budget for FYE 2013 through a slide presentation, noting that the proposed budget represents a 0% increase over the current year. Mr. Kadri remarked that an attempt is made to get to know each individual child as precisely as possible; and, when needed, intervene to ensure student success.

VI. OPENING OF PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Somers called the FYE 2013 Budget Public Hearing to order at 8:13 p.m.

Jack Sebastian, 4 East Shore Avenue, an RTM member, encouraged the Council to reduce the proposed budget by \$2 million. In the future, he suggested giving objectives to the Town Manager regarding budget preparation. Mr. Sebastian urged Councilors to make no increase in the Board of Education operational or capital improvement budget.

Ed Ettinger, 174 Cedar Road, Mystic, does not want an increase in property taxes. He noted that any savings from school closings have already been eaten up, and he is concerned that over the last ten years the Board of Education budget has continued to increase, while the student population has decreased. Mr. Ettinger stated that spending has reached an unaffordable level.

John Casey, 65 Pequot Avenue, Mystic, Vice-President of the Mystic & Noank Library Board of Trustees, asked Councilors to appropriate the full amount requested by the library. He stated that the library has dedicated staff and does not just lend books, but enhances the quality of life in Groton. Mr. Casey also supports the Board of Education budget request.

Frances Pan, 38 West Mystic Avenue, Mystic, also registered her support for the Mystic & Noank Library, stating that the Town is very fortunate to have a library serving each geographic area.

Sidney VanZandt, 3 Front Street, Noank, is appalled by the proposed \$15 million economic development project to provide utilities to Flanders Road. She noted that at the State level there is a major emphasis on reducing sprawl and keeping development areas in the center of town. Ms. VanZandt is opposed to this expenditure.

Claiborne VanZandt, 3 Front Street, Noank, does not believe that the Town will get a \$15 million return on its investment if it proceeds with the Flanders Road project. Other areas that do not require additional utility projects need to be explored, and Mr. VanZandt noted that Pfizer will be selling or leasing some of its buildings. He hopes that this proposal will be eliminated from the budget.

Rosanne Kotowski, 24 Ann Avenue, an RTM member, requested that the Council make holding the line on taxes its number one goal. She stated that difficult decisions need to be made regarding cutting spending, eliminating services, and scaling back programs. Taxpayers simply cannot afford further increases, and Ms. Kotowski feels that Groton needs to live within its means.

Neal Gardner, 111 Mitchell Street, an RTM member, expressed his concern that there is no expansion in the tax base, which continues to increase the burden on the local taxpayer. He noted that the majority of citizens do not use most of the services the Town provides, and any service not being utilized by a majority of taxpayers should be eliminated. He also requested a reform of employee and pension benefits. He would like the FYE 2013 budget to be cut to a level that is 5% less than the FYE 2012 budget.

George O'Brien, 99 Noble Avenue, Noank, requested that Councilors take a sharper look at the budget. He noted that taxes continue to go up, and the Council needs to tighten its belt and find a way to do more with less.

Kevin Trejo, 536 Shennecossett Road, suggested that Councilors look closely at Human Services and Public Safety (i.e., community policing) to determine if the amounts are sufficiently funded during these tough economic times. Mr. Trejo suggested that the Council ask the Town Manager to provide information regarding what would be eliminated to achieve a 2-3% budget cut in each department. He also requested a decrease in the Board of Education budget due to decreased student enrollment.

Mayor Somers declared the public hearing closed at 8:51 p.m.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

By consensus, the meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Attest:

Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk

Clerk of the Council

Lori Watrous, Office Assistant